



Leaders Needed

Ungodly leadership will lead to God's wrath.

MICAH 3:1-12

Many children on playgrounds have played the game *Follow the Leader*. The designated leader designs a course and leads the way. Some leaders create courses that everyone can follow while other leaders take the group on a path few can finish. The same scenario gets played out in real life, with some leaders taking paths to safety while others take a dangerous path. God's people need godly leaders who help them stay on God's path.

How do we know if a leader has our best interests in mind?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

MICAH 1:1–3:12

Micah was a prophet who preached to Judah between 730 and 690 BC. His name meant “Who is like Yahweh?” In Micah 7:18 he said, “Who is a God like you, forgiving iniquity and passing over rebellion for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not hold on to his anger forever because he delights in faithful love.” This was a play on Micah’s name. Micah’s preaching took place during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah as kings of Judah. This was a time of material prosperity for Judah, but it was also a time of spiritual drought for the nation.

Micah’s prophecy contains several reoccurring themes. He affirmed the sovereignty of God (Mic. 1:2; 4:11-13) in the sense that God is not a tribal deity who is limited in time and space. Micah also emphasized the judgment of God. The nation stirred up God’s anger due to their sin (5:14). The sins of Judah included idolatry (1:7; 5:12), murder (7:2), oppression of the poor (2:1-2), lying (6:12), stealing (6:11), and turning a deaf ear to those who needed help (3:1-4). Mixed with the theme of judgment is the theme of hope. A remnant would survive and a Messiah was coming.

Micah began with a prediction of future judgment coming on both Israel and Judah (1:1-7). He lamented the coming destruction and encouraged all true followers of God to join him in sorrow (1:8-16). He reinforced that this judgment was not unwarranted but would fall on those who dream up wickedness (2:1). Their oppression of the poor did not go unnoticed by God, and He was planning a disaster for the nation (2:3). God promised to bring judgment, but He also promised to gather a remnant from among them and to serve as their Leader (2:12-13). It’s this reference to God as Leader that turns the attention to the self-serving leaders who were leading Judah astray (3:1-12).

As you read Micah 3:1-12, note the actions of the leaders. How important is it for the people of God to have godly leadership?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

SELF-SERVING LEADERSHIP (MICAH 3:1-4)

¹ Then I said, “Now listen, leaders of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel. Aren’t you supposed to know what is just?” ² You hate good and love evil. You tear off people’s skin and strip their flesh from their bones. ³ You eat the flesh of my people after you strip their skin from them and break their bones. You chop them up like flesh for the cooking pot, like meat in a cauldron.” ⁴ Then they will cry out to the LORD, but he will not answer them. He will hide his face from them at that time because of the crimes they have committed.

VERSES 1-3

Micah began with the political and judicial leaders of his day (Mic. 3:1-4). The problem was not that the leaders were inept, but that they were ungodly. God had appointed leaders to guide His people in the right ways, but those leaders had neglected their responsibility and had incurred the wrath of God against their nation.

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Drawing attention to these leaders, Micah said: ***Now listen, leaders of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel.*** He began with a question, ***Aren’t you supposed to know what is just?*** The leaders knew what was right to do but were not doing it. Among all people, they should have known the principles of fairness and equity. But knowledge meant more than information. It also included correct administration. James would later define sin as knowing the right thing to do and failing to do it (Jas. 4:17). The leaders were not acting in ignorance but in open rebellion to the calling God had given them to lead His people.

What is more hurtful, an ungodly leader or an inept leader? Explain.

Leaders would have known Exodus 23:6-8, that justice was to be ensured for the poor. This passage also spoke about bribes and the corruption that came with them. The leaders of Micah's day treated the poor and oppressed as animals that were butchered and prepared to be eaten. They would **strip their skin . . . break their bones** and **chop them up like flesh for the cooking pot**. Horrifyingly, this described the attitudes of leaders toward the people God intended them to serve. Cannibalism was not widely practiced in Israel, but it was not unprecedented in rare occasions of famine or siege (see 2 Kings 6:26-29). The shock value of Micah's words exposed the self-serving attitude of the leaders who could not resist the temptation to use political power for their own gain.

BIBLE SKILL: *Use a Bible dictionary to learn more about a feature of Israel's leadership.*

Use a Bible dictionary to look up the offices of "judge," "priest," and "prophet." Note your findings about these offices and their roles and importance in the life of Israel in the Old Testament. How does this information shed light on Micah's message?

VERSE 4

The rulers of Israel would not escape God's judgment. One day, the roles would be reversed and those leaders would face the injustice of their captors in Assyria and Babylon. In the day when the leaders no longer had the power they now held, they would **cry out to the LORD** but He would **not answer them**. They had turned a deaf ear to those who were poor and oppressed, and now God would refuse to hear their prayers. He would **hide his face from them at that time**.

Pray for your leaders, that they may heed the words of Micah and realize that they will give to God an account of their service. If you are a leader, God has placed you there for principle not popularity. He has placed you there to show grace, not greed. He expects you to be selfless not selfish.

CORRUPT PROPHETS (MICAH 3:5-8)

⁵ This is what the LORD says concerning the prophets who lead my people astray, who proclaim peace when they have food to sink their teeth into but declare war against the one who puts nothing in their mouths. ⁶ Therefore, it will be night for you — without visions; it will grow dark for you — without divination. The sun will set on these prophets, and the daylight will turn black over them. ⁷ Then the seers will be ashamed and the diviners disappointed. They will all cover their mouths because there will be no answer from God. ⁸ As for me, however, I am filled with power by the Spirit of the LORD, with justice and courage, to proclaim to Jacob his rebellion and to Israel his sin.

VERSES 5-7

Micah targeted not only political leaders but also corrupt religious leaders. Ironically, he used the phrase, ***this is what the LORD says***, to speak against those who claimed to speak on God's behalf. Prophets in Micah's day were proclaiming ***peace***. They were declaring prosperity for the people of God while the Assyrians and later the Babylonians were being prepared to bring judgment against the injustices of Israel and Judah.

The motives of the corrupt prophets were exposed by the revelation that they preached peace to the ones who fed them. The words ***sink their teeth*** referred to the bite of a serpent. The people listening to these prophets and providing their luxury didn't realize they were actually feeding the serpent. While the prophets preached about ease and prosperity, the enemies of God's people were preparing to overtake them. On the other hand, those who could offer the false prophets nothing were the people against whom they would ***declare war***. The poor, the oppressed, and the downtrodden would serve as the source of these corrupt prophets' greed.

KEY DOCTRINE: *The Christian and the Social Order*

Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. (See Micah 6:8; James 2:8.)

As a result of their corruption, the prophets would lose their ability to receive revelation from God. It would be like **night** to them as the **sun** would set on the ministry of the prophets. Unable to hear God, they would continue to speak on His behalf but would be **ashamed** and **disappointed** when that message did not come true. They would be exposed as false prophets because there was **no answer from God**.

VERSE 8

In the strongest terms possible, Micah contrasted himself with the false prophets. He said, ***As for me, I am filled with power by the Spirit of the LORD***. He did not serve the people for what he could get from them but rather to preach the truth of God that led to **justice and courage**. Instead of always preaching peace and prosperity, he spoke against the **rebellion** of **Jacob** and the **sin** of **Israel**. A true man of God must not only speak about the hope of peace and prosperity but also of the dire consequences of sin. Those who do only one or the other of those things are not accurately preaching the truth.

We need leaders unafraid to stand for the truth and who will speak up for those who do not have a voice.

Micah preached the hope of Messiah and the judgment of sin because of two characteristics of his ministry. First, he was empowered by the *Spirit of the LORD*. He did not speak his own words in his own power, but he spoke the Word of the Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit. Second, Micah preached with *justice and courage*. Because he spoke in the power of the Spirit, His message was just; he cared about those who were experiencing injustice. He had the

courage to confront sin and point others to the Messiah. We, like those in Micah's day, need church leaders who are willing to preach with a sense of divine justice. We need leaders unafraid to stand for the truth and who will speak up for those who do not have a voice. Christian leaders should be leaders, not followers, when it comes to standing for the poor and oppressed.

What role should religious leaders play in shaping culture?

RESPONSIBILITY DECLARED (MICAH 3:9-12)

⁹ Listen to this, leaders of the house of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert everything that is right, ¹⁰ who build Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with injustice. ¹¹ Her leaders issue rulings for a bribe, her priests teach for payment, and her prophets practice divination for silver. Yet they lean on the LORD, saying, "Isn't the LORD among us? No disaster will overtake us." ¹² Therefore, because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become ruins, and the temple's mountain will be a high thicket.

VERSES 9-11

Micah revealed that both Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed. The leaders would bear that responsibility because they had disregarded **justice** and perverted **everything that is right**. The people of God saw both Jerusalem and the temple as signs of their irreversible right-standing with God. Micah revealed that this was not the case. In fact, he revealed that **Zion**, another name for the city of Jerusalem as well as the temple, was built **with bloodshed**. Both the temple and the city of Jerusalem, in all of their majesty, were built on the foundation of oppressing the poor. Corrupt leaders had taxed the people heavily and, in doing so, oppressed those who cried out to God in their injustice.

Instead of hearing the cry of the oppressed, the **leaders** issued rulings **for a bribe**. They made decisions not on the basis of what was right or wrong but on who could pay the most. Bribery was prohibited throughout the Old Testament (Ex. 23:8; Deut. 16:19; Isa. 1:23; 5:23).

The priests also taught only for **payment**. This is not to say that it was wrong to pay the priest. God had set up the system that provided for the priests and the Levites. Rather, it was a condemnation of those who preached only for payment. The false prophets were motivated by greed.

In spite of the unethical behavior of the leaders, they claimed: ***Isn't the LORD among us? No disaster will overtake us.*** They had a mistaken temple theology which claimed that because the temple was there, God would not judge their sin.

How are the attitudes toward God expressed by the leaders seen in our world today?

VERSE 12

Micah declared: ***Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become ruins, and the temple's mountain will be a high thicket.***

These would have been shocking words to those immersed in temple theology. Before an area could be plowed and planted, it had to be cleared, and Micah revealed that God would clear the city of Jerusalem to replant it.

Evidently one leader, King Hezekiah, heeded the words of Micah and it spurred him to great reform in Jerusalem (Jer. 26:17-19; 2 Kings 18:1-6; 2 Chron. 29:1-31:21). Though God judged the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC, He did not at that time allow Jerusalem to face destruction. The leaders in the north did not respond to prophecies of Isaiah and Hosea. The leaders of the Southern Kingdom, however, took responsibility and were spared for the moment. God was just in judging the sin of Israel, and He was gracious in sparing Judah under the leadership of Hezekiah. That reprieve would not last forever. As God promised, Jerusalem and the temple would face destruction in 586/587 BC during another time of ungodly leaders.

How can godly leaders begin to take responsibility for godliness in the culture where they lead?
